

# The US Doesn't Want to Stop The Islamic State (ISIL) - Only Exploit them for Other Means

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Global Research, August 14, 2015

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [SYRIA](#)

This article was originally published by GR in November 2014

*Doubts have been raised over the alleged alignment of al-Nusra and ISIL. [Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi](#) has reasonably argued that perhaps the western-backed FSA factions are falsifying this link as a means to justify more US-Support.*

*[Brandon Turbeville](#) has also reasonably argued that this could be a marketing ploy by western media to justify more US-aid. If reports of this alignment are false, the facts remain that large amounts of US-backed rebels (SRF/FSA/Hazm) have defected to Nusra and ISIL, many, as the above Washington Post report states, have done so peacefully and without a fight. If the Nusra-ISIL link is true, then my argument stands that this in no way justifies more US-aid to rebel groups, and it instead means that al-Nusra has taken US-aid given to it by western-backed rebels to ally with ISIL*

Instead of deterring the radical Islamist group, American airstrikes against them have accomplished two things: they have increased ISIL recruitment while at the same time have destroyed and degraded Syria's infrastructure, murdering innocent Syrian civilians along the way.

FBI Director James Comey told Congress in mid-September, just a week before airstrikes against ISIL expanded from Iraq and into Syria, that, "Support for Islamic State increased after U.S. airstrikes began in Iraq," and, "ISIL's widespread use of social media and growing online support intensified following the commencement of U.S. airstrikes in Iraq."<sup>(1)</sup> According to the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a large increase of 6,300 new fighters has been recruited into the group since the US began airstrikes.<sup>(2)(3)</sup> This is not surprising given the fact that Islamic extremist groups like ISIL draw their greatest legitimacy among their constituency from either actually fighting, or appearing to fight against the United States.

A month ago, Patrick Cockburn, a leading correspondent on the Middle-East, reported that, "The US-led air attacks launched against Islamic State (also known as Isis) on 8 August in Iraq and 23 September in Syria have not worked. President Obama's plan to "degrade and destroy" Islamic State has not even begun to achieve success. In both Syria and Iraq, Isis is expanding its control rather than contracting."<sup>(4)</sup>

Despite not only failing to degrade ISIL, the US airstrikes have also accomplished another long-standing US goal in the region: the further destabilization of the Syrian state. It has

accomplished this by bombing Syria's energy facilities and infrastructure under the pretext of choking off the revenues ISIL receives from its illicit oil sales. However this justification completely falls apart upon closer examination.

The US has been bombing oil and gas production sites, including oil fields and refineries inside Syria, and following one such strike in late September [Reuters](#) would report, "These so-called refineries are not a real target and they do not weaken Islamic State as they do not have any financial value for them," Rami Abdelrahman of the [Syrian] Observatory [for Human Rights] told Reuters. "They are composed of trucks with equipment to separate diesel and petrol used by civilians." These attacks, instead of striking at ISIL's financial base, are accomplishing only the further destruction of Syrian infrastructure.

Coupled with this is the fact that although there have been widespread airstrikes against oil production in Syria, there have however been exactly zero strikes against oil production facilities inside of Iraq; the US is keeping in-tact energy facilities inside of the state that it has control over, whilst destroying the infrastructure of Syrian state which it seeks to degrade and destroy. This two-faced approach is a further attack upon the Syrian government, eliminating any chance they have of recapturing their nation's oil refineries intact, which would also subordinate Syria to foreign investment in the rebuilding process if they were ever to be recovered. "The destruction of Syria's oil infrastructure would also open the door for US and UK oil companies to win contracts to rebuild it, paid for in debt, by the Syrian state. Foreign companies running Syria's oil and gas production would prevent Syria from nationalising their own resources and becoming an independent prosperous country. This would result in the basic enslavement of the country while mitigating the threat it poses to US client states including Israel, Saudi Arabia and Turkey," [Maram Susli](#), a chemist who worked alongside Theodore Postol to debunk false claims of Assad's complicity in the Ghouta chemical weapons attack, further analyzes.<sup>(5)(6)</sup>

It should also be noted that this isn't just an attack on the Syrian government, it is also an attack on the Syrian people, as fuel and oil prices have soared following the bombings, as well as have electrical failures and power blackouts. "The Americans are destroying our infrastructure," one 35-year old resident said.<sup>(7)</sup> It should be stated that in the end, these oil resources ultimately belong to the Syrian people.

Casting further doubt on the United States' stated aims is the fact that senior Obama administration officials are now considering bombing pipelines in Syria "in an attempt to cut off the huge profits being made by Isis from captured oilfields."<sup>(8)</sup> However ISIL does not use these pipelines to transport and sell its oil, instead it uses trucks and smuggles the oil through Turkey. "Current oil production by the Islamic State in the Levant (ISIL) is estimated to be worth \$800 million per year... The oil that ISIL sales on the black market—**mostly via trucks through smuggling routes on the Turkish border**—is sold at a steep discount at prices ranging from \$25-\$60 per barrel," [IHS](#), the consulting company widely quoted as an authority on ISIL oil revenues, reports. Thus we see the seeds being planted for further justifications to attack and destroy Syria's energy industry, with no valid connection to stopping ISIL. (emphasis added)

Along with the destruction of Syria's oil infrastructure, in September the Ambassador for the European Union in Iraq, Jana Hybaskova, testified before the European Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee stating that several EU member states have bought oil from the Islamic

State, while refusing to name the guilty parties.<sup>(9)</sup> So while the western powers are profiting from ISIL's illicit oil trade, keeping intact the refineries and oil fields in Iraq presumably to do so, they are as well destroying Syria's infrastructure, as a further way to destabilize the Syrian state.

### **US-Supplied Rebels Align with al-Qaeda, al-Qaeda Aligns with ISIL**

On November 1<sup>st</sup> Jamal Maarouf's forces, the US-backed Syrian Revolutionary Front, were routed by al-Nusra, and according to reports ISIL fought alongside Nusra in the attack.<sup>(10)</sup> Back in April, CIA-vetted Maarouf admitted to working alongside al-Nusra, providing the al-Qaeda group with whatever US-supplied weapons they needed whenever they asked for them.<sup>(11)</sup> Despite US officials being aware of the fact that their weapons were going straight to al-Qaeda, in September Congress approved Obama's plan of arming and training more rebels.<sup>(12)</sup> Now it seems that al-Nusra, strengthened by weapons given to them while fighting along-side US-sponsored rebels, are using their US-weapons to ally with ISIL and take more weapons and fighters from the US-backed SRF headed by CIA-vetted Maarouf.

A day after Maarouf was routed on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, in the early hours of the morning between midnight and 4am, according to AP sources al-Nusra and ISIL agreed to stop fighting each other and to work together. Agreements were made to work against the US-backed Syrian Revolutionary Front and Harakat Hazm. FSA and Harakat Hazm fighters were reportedly overtaken by al-Nusra later that day, ISIL sending about 100 fighters in 22 pickup trucks to aid in the effort.<sup>(13)</sup> Al-Nusra is the longtime ally of the US-backed FSA. Back in early September FSA commander Bassel Idriss [stated](#), ""We are collaborating with the Islamic State and the Nusra Front... Let's face it: The Nusra Front is the biggest power present right now in Qalamoun and we as FSA would collaborate on any mission they launch." It should be noted that Congress agreed to further supply Syrian rebels just a week after this admission.

Now it seems that al-Nusra and ISIL have joined forces against the FSA, yet reports of the encounter state that the FSA and Harakat Hazm militants defected to Nusra and ISIL peacefully, transferring large quantities of US-supplied weapons to them while doing so all without a fight.

**"Moderate rebels who had been armed and trained by the United States either surrendered or defected to the extremists as the Jabhat al-Nusra group, affiliated with al-Qaeda, swept through the towns and villages the moderates controlled in the northern province of Idlib, in what appeared to be a concerted push to vanquish the moderate Free Syrian Army."**

"Among the groups whose bases were overrun in the assault was Harakat Hazm, the biggest recipient of U.S. assistance offered under a small-scale, covert CIA program launched this year, including the first deliveries of U.S.-made TOW antitank missiles. The group's headquarters outside the village of Khan Subbul was seized by Jabhat al-Nusra overnight Saturday, after rebel fighters there **surrendered their weapons and fled without a fight.**" ([Washington Post](#), 11/2/14) (emphasis added)

This raises the question as to whether they were overrun at all, or if they freely allied with the much more successful and resource-equipped al-Nusra and ISIL groups.

In sum, US-backed Maarouf and his SFR, who admittedly have been fighting alongside and giving US weapons to al-Qaeda all along, were overtaken by Nusra and ISIL, their fighters defecting and their weapons being transferred. Al-Nusra and ISIL have also agreed to work together, and the US-backed FSA and Harakat Hazm groups have freely defected to Nusra and ISIL, taking with them all of their US-supplied weaponry, including TOW antitank missiles.

It is not surprising that defections to Nusra and ISIL are widespread. “Abu Majid, another rebel leader, **who has been receiving western support for six months**, said it had not prevented his recent defeat by Jabhat al-Nusra and that he was losing faith. **More than 1,000 men, half his brigade’s strength, had left in despair, many defecting to Isil.**”

**“Defection to the jihadists has now been going on for years.** Mahmoud, a former prisoner of the regime **who used to work for the FSA, now runs safe houses in Turkey for foreign fighters looking to join Jabhat al-Nusra and Isil.**” ([The Telegraph](#), 11/11/14) (emphasis added)

This is not surprising given the fact that the majority of the arms shipments coordinated by the US through Saudi Arabia and Qatar have gone to the extremist elements that the Gulf States historically always have supported. For years the US has been actively coordinated the arming of the most virulent elements inside of Syria, making them the most powerful players within the region. A year ago the [New York Times](#) reported that, **“Most of the arms shipped at the behest of Saudi Arabia and Qatar to supply Syrian rebel groups fighting the government of Bashar al-Assad are going to hard-line Islamic jihadists**, and not the more secular opposition groups that the West wants to bolster, according to American officials and Middle Eastern diplomats.”

**“The United States is not sending arms directly to the Syrian opposition. Instead, it is providing intelligence and other support for shipments of secondhand light weapons like rifles and grenades into Syria, mainly orchestrated from Saudi Arabia and Qatar.** The reports indicate that **the shipments organized from Qatar, in particular, are largely going to hard-line Islamists.**” (emphasis added)

Therefore the fact that the most hard-lined extremist in Syria are also the most powerful makes a lot more sense. As the media constantly has been telling us that the US is only arming ‘moderate’ rebels, it has instead been coordinated the arming of Nusra and ISIL through its allied Gulf states Saudi Arabia and Qatar. At the same time it has been overseeing this arming of extremist, al-Qaeda jihadists, it has also been actively funding ‘vetted’ groups like the FSA and SRF who have been working alongside Nusra and ISIL, freely coordinated with them while supplying them with US-weaponry the CIA had given to them just days before. The end result of all of this is that Nusra and ISIL have become the dominant military forces within the region, prompting widespread defection of groups armed and trained by the US into their ranks. As Nusra and ISIL have grown stronger through US tutelage, they have further been able to overcome other recipients of US aid like the Harakat Hazm brigades, further consolidating US-weaponry and US-trained fighters.

Anthony Cartalucci [has argued](#), “But if the so-called “Free Syrian Army” (FSA) is being funded, armed, trained, and otherwise supported with the combined resources of the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, NATO-member Turkey, Jordan, Israel, and others, just how exactly is the “Islamic State,” and other extremist factions such as Al Qaeda’s Syrian franchise, Al Nusra, getting *even more* cash and weapons?”

“The answer... is that there were never, nor are there any “moderates” operating in Syria. The West has intentionally armed and funded Al Qaeda and other sectarian extremists...”

This is similar to the argument used by [Senator Rand Paul](#) when he recently testified against the arming of rebels in September before the Congress voted to approve the measure, deciding apparently that arming al-Qaeda and ISIL is worth the price of regime-change in Syria: If the US and its allies have been arming moderate factions, to the tune of [up to a billion dollars](#), how is it that the so-called moderates are virtually non-existent while the extremist elements have all of the power, weapons, and fighters?

### **Roots of the Bombing Campaign - Why US is Bombing ISIL**

It should be understood that before the beginning of this year, when ISIL broke away and started fighting al-Nusra, that Nusra and ISIL had been working together for years. Former British Army and Metropolitan Police counterterrorism intelligence officer [Charles Shoebridge has stated](#), “It should also be noted in this respect that the ‘moderate’ rebels the US and UK support themselves openly welcomed the arrival of such extremists. Indeed, the Free Syria Army backed by the West was allied with ISIS, until ISIS attacked them at the end of 2013.”

‘Vetted’ US rebels such as the FSA and the Syrian Revolutionary Front have admittedly been transferring US-supplied arms to, and working with, al-Nusra, who for the entirety of the Syrian crisis before 2014 was allied with ISIL, a working relationship we now see has reemerged as recent developments have unfolded.

When ISIL and Nusra did begin fighting earlier this year, we have seen that Obama had done nothing as ISIL was rampaging throughout Syria. He was, however, benefitting from the media PR campaign which could now state that Obama’s rebels were fighting the evil ISIL terrorists, the American public conveniently forgetting that those rebels were fighting alongside al-Qaeda as they were doing so.

The rise of ISIL and their subsequent push into Iraq was anticipated; as early as February it was already predicted that ISIL would attempt to take territory in Iraq. On February 11<sup>th</sup> the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, delivered the annual DIA threat assessment to the Senate Armed Service Committee. He stated, ““Al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI), also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL): AQI/ISIL probably will attempt to take territory in Iraq and Syria to exhibit its strength in 2014, as demonstrated recently in Ramadi and Fallujah, and the group’s ability to concurrently maintain multiple safe havens in Syria.”<sup>(14)</sup> The push of ISIS into Iraq was anticipated and known, yet the Obama administration had done nothing to stop them. The Wall Street Journal further states that, “The failure to confront ISIS sooner wasn’t an intelligence failure. It was a failure by policy makers to act on events that were becoming so obvious that the



Iraqis were asking for American help for months before Mosul fell. Mr. Obama declined to offer more than token assistance.”

However, we do not have to wonder why Obama refused to act in this regard, he told us himself. In an August interview with the [New York Times](#), Obama said the reason, “that we did not just start taking a bunch of airstrikes all across Iraq as soon as ISIL came in was because that would have taken the pressure off of [Prime Minister Nuri Kamal] al-Maliki.” Obama thus exploited the rise of ISIL in order to obtain the geopolitical goal of pressuring Maliki to step down, which happened shortly afterwards. The plan was successful, the slaughter and subjugation of countless Iraqi’s mere ‘collateral damage’ for this ‘higher end.’

ISIL then went onto consolidate its holdings further into Iraq, culminating in the overtaking of Mosul. An event which [Noam Chomsky](#) describes as being, “pretty remarkable. In fact, western military analysts were astonished. Remember what happened, Iraq has an army, and the Iraqi army knows how to fight. During the Iran-Iraq war that army fought hard and viciously, and in fact ultimately won the war, with US support. There was an Iraqi army of 350,000 men, armed to the teeth with all kinds of advanced weapons. They had been trained by the United States for over a decade. They were faced by a couple of thousand lightly armed jihadi’s. First thing that happened was all the generals ran away. Then all the troops ran away, leaving their weapons behind them. And then the jihadi forces just marched into Mosul and then into large parts of Iraq. It was a pretty amazing phenomenon, it tells you a lot if you think about it.”

The Guardian would report,

“Iraqi officials told the Guardian that two divisions of Iraqi soldiers – roughly 30,000 men – simply turned and ran in the face of the assault by an insurgent force of just 800 fighters. Isis extremists roamed freely on Wednesday through the streets of Mosul, openly surprised at the ease with which they took Iraq’s second largest city after three days of sporadic fighting.”<sup>(15)</sup>

The main discourse on this ‘amazing phenomenon’ has stated a few reasons to explain this event, however virtually no one, besides [Professor Michel Chossudovsky](#), has been asking the obvious questions, “Had the senior Iraqi commanders been instructed by their Western military advisers to hand over the city to the ISIS terrorists? Were they co-opted?”

These questions are highly justified to ask. Most analyst readily accept that the army was disloyal and unwilling to fight for their cities and thus fled, however asking whether they were instructed to flee is no more far-fetched than these mainstream assumptions.

Still after this the US did not start its airstrikes, it was only after ISIL began to threaten the Kurdish region of Erbil that the US initiated its bombing campaign. The bombings were started ostensibly to defend the beleaguered Yazidi’s from the oncoming ISIL advance, however the problem with this is that the Yazidi’s were already protected and being escorted off Mt. Sinjar a full 3 days before the first US action; they were already being protected. The US announced its airstrikes on August the 8<sup>th</sup>, <sup>(16)</sup> while the socialist Kurdish PKK fighters had already begun rescuing the Yazidi’s as early as the 5<sup>th</sup>. <sup>(17)</sup>

The real reason the US bombed ISIL now and not before was to protect western oil interests

located in Erbil,<sup>(18)</sup> as well as defend the myriad of CIA agents stationed in the region,<sup>(19)</sup> along with the Israeli intelligence and military operatives conducting anti-Syrian and anti-Iranian operations.<sup>(20)</sup> Obama admitted as much, “Obama, in a statement delivered at the White House late Thursday, said that strikes would be launched against extremist convoys “should they move toward” the Kurdish capital of Irbil, where the United States maintains a consulate and a joint operations center with the Iraqi military.”

“We intend to take action if they threaten our facilities anywhere in Iraq . . . including Irbil and Baghdad,” he said.” ([Washington Post](#), 8/8/14)

Obama was fine with ISIL rampaging through Iraq, killing civilians and pressuring Maliki to resign, until they threatened western oil interests.

Thus the Yazidi’s were saved by the socialists the US says is a terrorist organization, their bombs beginning to drop 3 days after the fact while the Yazidi’s were already safe and being evacuating off the mountain, all in order to protect Chevron and Exxon.<sup>(21)(22)</sup>

### **Mission Creep - ISIL Bombings to Justify Military Intervention**

It has just been announced on November 12<sup>th</sup> that Obama is reviewing his ISIL strategy. “In just the past week, the White House has convened four meetings of the President’s national security team, one of which was chaired by Obama and others that were attended by principals like the secretary of state. These meetings, in the words of one senior official, were “driven to a large degree how our Syria strategy fits into our ISIS strategy.”<sup>(23)</sup>

Given the recent developments, of Nusra and ISIL aligning, of the US-backed rebels freely taking their US-training and US-arms into the ranks of al-Qaeda and ISIL, of how the US covert policy of Syrian regime-change [created ISIL, with a little help from their Gulf allies](#), one would perhaps think that the Obama administration would abandon its [oil-inspired plan](#) of using virulent Islamic extremists to topple Assad, realize that there has never been a ‘moderate’ rebel force in the region, that Assad, Hezbollah, Iran and Russia are the most capable forces able to defeat the ISIL and have in fact been fighting them and al-Qaeda for over 3 years, and work towards realistically combating terrorism in the region, but you would be gravely mistaken.

“I think the President wants to make sure that we’re asking hard questions about what we’re targeting in Syria, how we’re able to degrade ISIL but also how we’re supporting opposition and building them up as a counterweight to ISIL but **also ultimately of course to the Assad regime.**”

**“Assad has been the biggest magnet for extremism in Syria, and the President has made clear that Assad has lost all legitimacy to govern.** Alongside our efforts to isolate and sanction the Assad regime, we are working with our allies to strengthen the moderate opposition ...”

“Among the options being discussed are **a no-fly zone on the border with Turkey** and accelerating and expanding the Pentagon program to vet, train and arm the moderate opposition. Turkey has called for a no-fly zone, both to protect its border and **to provide relief to Syrian rebels facing airstrikes from the regime.**” (emphasis added)

It should be noted that the Syrian airstrikes are targeting al-Qaeda and ISIL rebels, and that a no-fly zone would protect the terrorists and further endanger the Syrian government along with the beleaguered Syrian population. As for arming more rebels, the evidence is abundantly clear that it was this exact same plan that created ISIL in the first place and encouraged terrorism to thrive in Syria, thus any such plans should be viewed for what they really mean: the Obama administration has chosen to continue supporting and showering weapons upon al-Qaeda linked extremist jihadi's for the 'greater good' of massacring the civilian population, further miring Syria in chaos and turning it into a failed-state, with the end goal of toppling the insubordinate Assad 'regime.'

We are now witnessing the contours of what many have been warning against all along, that the threat of ISIL and the US bombings that were justified through them, will eventually turn against the Syrian government, which, as stated above, is the real goal here.

The US will continue providing money and weapons to the rebels, never balking when proof after proof comes to light that their 'vetted' 'moderates' are working alongside al-Qaeda and ISIL, committing the exact same kinds of atrocities as them, and that all of the US-weapons in the region are going to violent extremists who daily murder innocents, rape women and children as young as 15 years old, eat the organs of their victims, and daily terrorize the Syrian population. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey, who through US oversight are the main actors responsible for aiding and supporting the worst of the extremists, will continue pushing for regime change, pressuring the US to expand its bombs towards Assad. As the war-hawk Republicans take control of the Senate in a month, with the likes of John McCain heading the Senate Armed Service Committee, the drums of war will continue to be sounded, loyally aided by the sycophantic mainstream media, and all will have forgotten the voices of the Syrian's themselves; the western hubris justifying these ungodly atrocities under the guise of 'helping' and 'protecting' the Syrian people, blinded by their imperial greed to the fact that the only ones calling for this 'help' are everyone *except* the Syrians themselves. It says a lot about one's stance when regime-change efforts are justified in the name of humanitarian aid the local population while the indigenous Syrian's themselves are opposed to it, compounded by the fact that such 'humanitarianism' involves arming and funding al-Qaeda and ISIL, although in reality, the FSA and SRF, along with all the rest, are themselves no different from the Islamic State.

There is still hope for the Syrians, but it will only be realized once we as western citizens honestly look upon our actions and understand our true role in all of this, and stop pretending to care about the Syrians by supporting an agenda aimed at making them suffer for the geopolitical aims of colonial powers. We should be willing to accept the hard truths of what we have been involved in, and not be diluted by more comfortable lies of our professed benevolence and high moral intentions. And not least of all, we should listen to what the Syrians have to say for themselves.

A few lost voices of the Syrian people, courtesy of [Eva Bartlett](#):

In a different area of Lebanon, I meet another Syrian, this time from the Aleppo outskirts. He is wiry, with grey hair though not yet 50, and a bright face, his presence emanating peace and calm... in spite of what he has gone through and lost.

"It isn't a revolution," he says, "What is that? Stealing from us, beheading us, destroying my country? How is that a revolution? If it was a revolution, you



target the government not the people, not the history.”<sup>(24)</sup>

Over the past two weeks in a small Lebanese village, I’ve gotten to know a number of Syrians, including a family from the Hasaka region in eastern Syria who’ve been pushed out of their village.

They returned six months ago, yearning to see their country, their home. But most people they knew had left, driven out by foreign terrorists. There was nothing left to return to.

“Their two kids help out with work but are otherwise in limbo, not able to continue university here...no money to do so. In Syria, it was virtually free.

Her words:

“We never thought we’d leave Syria, life was good. Everything was cheap, we had security. But we eventually had to.... not because of the government or the Syrian Army, because of the terrorists, mostly al-Nusra then. Now Daesh [ISIS] are there too, but they’re the same anyway.

Before we left, it had gotten to the point where we scarcely had access to water, had little electricity... The terrorists destroyed the power lines. The municipality would repair things and the terrorists would return and destroy them.”<sup>(25)</sup>

Following an [April 21 mortar attack](#) on Bab Touma, which killed 2 and maimed 23, I [spoke with](#) shop employees who had been present at the time of the attack. An employee in a shoe shop said:

“It was just after 3 pm, the area was packed with people. It happens a lot, a lot, a lot...all the time. Shrapnel flew everywhere, little bits and pieces. In the last two weeks, around ten mortars have landed in this area. This isn’t a revolution. They’ve come from outside. Do you know how we were living? We had security, work...but, sorry, now?”

“The terrorists know that their mortars accomplish nothing practically, they are just a vengeful act against the people of Damascus for not supporting them. Sometimes they film themselves as evidence of their loyalty, presented to anyone who would sponsor them financially to keep fighting against President Assad.”<sup>(26)</sup>

Although he chose to stay in the Old City, Father Frans was critical of the insurgents. In January 2012, he had [written](#): “From the start I saw armed demonstrators marching along in the protests, who began to shoot at the police first. Very often the violence of the security forces has been a reaction to the brutal violence of the armed rebels.”

“People in Homs were already armed and prepared before the protests began,” said Kanawati. “If they hadn’t been planning for the protests from the beginning, the people wouldn’t have had the quantity of arms that they had.”

Abu Nabeel explained that in addition to the Hamidiyeh district where various old churches are to be found, Christians in other areas occupied by the armed insurgents also fled. “There

were an estimated 100,000 Christians living in the Old City of Homs before it was taken over by terrorists. Most fled in February 2012. By March, only 800 had stayed, and by the end just over 100 remained," he said.

The siege that the Syrian army enforced on the Old City in an attempt to drive out the insurgents had a drastic effect on the daily lives of those remaining.

"Suddenly, we didn't have electricity or water. We had to wait for the water trucks to refill tanks," said Kanawati. "There were many elderly who couldn't leave their homes. We'd take food and medicine to people in the community.

Mohammed, a Syrian from the Qusoor district of Homs, is now one of the reported 6.5 million internally-displaced Syrians. He spoke of the sectarian nature of the insurgents and protests from the very beginning in 2011.

"I was renting a home in a different neighbourhood of Homs, while renovating my own house. Just beyond my balcony there were protests that did not call for 'freedom' or even overthrowing the 'regime'. They chanted sectarian mottos, they said they would fill al-Zahara - an Alawi neighbourhood - with blood. And also al-Nezha - where there are many Alawis and Christians."

"My aunt lives in another neighbourhood nearby. She's Allawi and her husband is Sunni. Because she is Allawi, the 'rebels' wanted to kill her two sons. I chose Bashar al-Assad, so they said, 'we will kill you, because you chose him.'"<sup>(27)</sup>

This is a conversation I had with a Homs man earlier in June. Homs, dubbed by the corporate media the "heart of the 'revolution'..." hear what he says about freedom and the terrorist-rebels:

"You call for 'freedom', so my choice is Bashar al-Assad. This is my choice. 'No, we must kill you for this choice, because you don't know....you must die for this choice.'"<sup>(28)</sup>

"Later, in a convenience store near my crappo apartment-hotel, I chat with Samer, from Jaramana. Things are better he says, and I experienced. Less mortars now. "Udhak alei? You're laughing at me? Democracy? That's what this is about?" he says of the corporate media/NGOs/Western line of "human rights" and "freedom and democracy" re Syria."<sup>(29)</sup>

Back at the simple hotel I've stayed in here I see Mahmoud, the young Syrian teen I'd spoken with a couple of times while here last month.

"How's the situation in Syria?" he asks earnestly when he understands I've just come back. I tell him Damascus, while still being mortared by those terrorists, is a little quieter now that the Syrian army has cleared them out of some areas of the Damascus countryside. And I mention that Kasab has now been liberated. "I know! I was hearing that just now on the news," he says.

I'd been unsure of where he stood politically when I spoke with him before, but tonight he made it clear.

"I haven't seen my family in three years. Those dogs "Jaysh al Horr" ("Free

Syrian Army”) control the area of Ghouta where my family lives. If I go back to Damascus, I can’t see them. If I tried to go to my home, they’d slaughter me. God rid us of those bearded men.”<sup>(30)</sup>

Yesterday, meeting with someone to coordinate a visit to an area outside of Damascus, after taking a phone call, he lamented that pretty much no corporate media will cover the story he’s just been reminded of: a man from the Latakia countryside whose male family members were slaughtered and female members kidnapped by foreign mercenaries in August 2013. The man himself has gone blind from an injury at the time. “They don’t want to hear these stories, it doesn’t suit their narrative,” my contact said.”<sup>(31)</sup>

Back at my hosts’ rented home in a different area of Homs, they show me photos and videos of their own ravaged home, footage which Abu Abdu took himself. He meticulously points out how not only did the “revolutionaries” occupying their home utterly trash and destroy it, but they thieved every conceivable thing from it. “Here, they took the motor to the washing machine. Here, they stripped the fridge of its motor. Here, they took the taps in the kitchen. They stripped the electrical wiring.” Basically, they took anything that could be ripped out of wall or floor that could in any way be sold: metals, piping, wiring...and of course all of the family’s jewelry and valuables

In the video he shows, the bedrooms are so trashed and a hole has been knocked into a wall for passage to the next apartment... you’d think the IOF had been here instead of the “freedom-loving revolutionaries.”<sup>(32)</sup>

“They want to burn Syria from within, want to leave these factions fighting each until Syria is burned down and Syria is bled-out.”<sup>(33)</sup>

Even when I’m not “looking” for stories to share from Syrians, they come to me. Sitting at the sea, a young man a few metres away began talking with me after he saw my Syria wristband. I asked a few general questions, and then he let loose on the hell that is life in Halab (Aleppo) with the foreign insurgents. He did so in the same mournful voice that others I’ve met here and in Syria have had, again without the bitterness and anger you’d expect from people suffering so greatly under this manufactured crisis filled with its unending, ghastly atrocities.

He also said what virtually every other Syrian I’ve met has said: “You should have seen Syria before, it was the most beautiful place, the safest place.

Walked into a supermarket which I forgot I’d been to... When I got to the counter I realized he was Abu Mohammed, the new Sweida friend [I’d met some days ago](#), who’d insisted on serving me coffee.

“Hi Ava (Eva, Ava, I like both renditions), I read many things on your blog... what you wrote about Gaza and now about Syria. You wrote the truth about us! Thank you! We want people to know we are not like what the TV says about us.”<sup>(34)</sup>

Most news accounts of Syria paint a desolate, sectarian country where people in areas secured by the Syrian army are miserable and where people, above all, want to see Bashar

al-Assad gone. In all regards I found the opposite. In particular, I found wide-spread, and usually ardent, support for the President.

We also visited two different schools now housing displaced Palestinians and Syrians from Yarmouk. Their words were the same. “The terrorists took over the camp, took over our houses, stole our food. We want the camp back. Tell your governments to tell those terrorists to leave Yarmouk.”

Berwin Ibrahim, chair of the National Youth Party for Justice and Development said, “We don’t agree with the regime on many things, but we insist that our homeland comes first. We have corruption in the government. But that is like any government. The conspiracy, terrorism, and interference from Western countries has united supporters of the government and the opposition,” she said.

One of the opposition who had formally called for Assad to step down, Mohammad Abu Qasem, Secretary General of the Solidarity Party, said, “What’s happening in Syria is international terrorism, with many countries interfering in Syria. Since the elections were announced, the insurgents started working harder in Kasab and in Aleppo.”

Feminist activist, Suheir Sarmini, Deputy Secretary General of the Syrian National Youth Party, said, “President Obama and Congress have armed these gangs to kill our children, our people. Tell Obama and Congress to stop killing the Syrian people and not to interfere in Syrian sovereignty.”

In contrast to accusations that no ‘real’ opposition could exist within Syria, Mazen al-Akhrass, a member of Syria’s NDF and a political analyst, pointed out that two very vocal (and far more critical than those I met) opposition members remain in Syria, unscathed.

“[Louay Hussein](#) and Hassan Abdul-Azeem are very well known and extremely against the regime, and they ask for more than ‘reforms’. Yet they have been living in Damascus—the “stronghold of the regime”—during the events, and their lives weren’t threatened. They are not in jail, and at this point they seem to have settled for partial reforms as a step towards full regime change.”

We met with Syria’s Grand Mufti, Dr. Ahmad Badr al-Din Hassoun. He spoke of the need for reconciliation and forgiveness amongst Syrians. He’s notable for walking the talk: Sheik Hassoun’s 21 year old son Sarya was assassinated in October 2011, on the same day that it was announced he’d be engaged ; during the funeral, while sobbing, [the Mufti called for forgiveness and reconciliation](#), even for those who murdered his son.

“All of the churches and mosques that have been destroyed, we can rebuild. But who will bring back our children? Who will bring back my son Saria? When we have violation against any child, it is a violation against God.

He mentioned that in March he’d been granted a prestigious Italian peace prize, by [The Ducci Foundation](#), for his non-sectarian preaching of interfaith peace. But the Mufti never got to Rome.

“I was granted a visa for only ten days. They were afraid I’d stay longer. But Europeans are among those killing our people. If all the Syrian people die, it’s

okay, no problem, just to keep their oil. I reject this 'democracy'. We in Syria are not Sunni or Shia or Allawi nor Muslim nor Christian. We are human beings and must be respected. They want to start a religious war. We are going to extinguish this fire."

On a personal note, I'd echo the Mufti's call, and those of so many others I met in Syria. Come to Syria, see for yourselves. Very quickly you can get a taste of the senseless mortars, and the horrific testimonies of those assaulted by foreign mercenaries and [takfiri ideologists](#). But also of the strength and resistance that is the Syrian people, who don't intend any time soon to fall to occupation, and who will vote for President Assad in June."<sup>(35)</sup>

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